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# Navigation of rivers in Wiskonsan

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H.R. Rep. No. 96, 26th Cong., 2nd Sess. (1841)

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NAVIGATION OF RIVERS IN WISKONSAN.

[To accompany bill H. R. No. 517.]

JULY 21, 1840.

Laid on the table.

JANUARY 9, 1841.

Printed by order of the House.

Mr. OGLE, from the Committee on Roads and Canals, reported a bill with the following title: "A bill to provide for the improvement of the navigation of certain rivers in Wiskonsan;" and also the following letter from James D. Doty, delegate from Wiskonsan; which he submitted as a

REPORT:

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,  
*Washington, July 1, 1840.*

SIR: Whoever will carefully examine the reports made by the War Department, upon the Wiskonsan Territory, will come to the conclusion that the Government of the United States is largely interested in the improvements recommended to the consideration of Congress at its present session.

The amount yearly expended in transporting men, rations, clothing, and munitions of war, to and from Fort Howard, Fort Winnebago, and Fort Crawford, (all within the boundaries of Wiskonsan,) would more than meet the interest on the whole expenditure. Besides, during the present dilatory process of transshipment, at the several interruptions, a great deal of time is lost, which, in a period of war or threatened peril, must prove highly dangerous.

With the view of effecting an easy communication between these forts of the Government, it is proposed to improve the Neenah and Wiskonsan rivers, at the different portages and rapids. It may not in every instance be necessary to enter upon the immediate execution of all the works; but they all ought to be executed, without much delay. A good road, for the extent of only eight miles, ought to be commenced and completed immediately, reaching from the Kawkalaw rapids, at La Fontaine, to the north end of Winnebago lake. By this short cut, as soon as perfected, there would be avoided, for the present, the interruptions in 22 miles of severe and resisting navigation. At the present time batteaux ascend the Neenah as high as the Kawkalaw; and steamboats are now preparing for this navigation, that will ascend with great ease to the spot where the road should commence. In addition to the advantages to the Government in improving this section of the country, by the construction of roads for military purposes, (for this would, in fact, be a military road, communicating between more forts than any other road in the nation) the unsold lands would soon be disposed of to industrious and hardy settlers—a body of men who would ever be prepared to maintain the

power of the Government on our borders. Every fresh arrival of emigrants to the new territory would help, by strengthening the extreme settlements, to prevent Indian disturbances on the borders of their country west of the Mississippi. The United States do not sufficiently consider the subject in this light; or they would, with the mere view to settlement, afford facilities to such as are willing to settle, particularly at their own private cost, on the extreme frontier, and thus secure peace by their numbers. If Florida had been properly settled, the Indians would long since either have hushed their war-whoop, or, it is more probable, would never have raised it.

If it is asked what has made the lands in the new southern and western States so valuable, the answer is to be found in the vast transfer of population from Europe and the old States. The almost countless number of steamboats that now send up their pillars of cloud by day, and pillars of fire by night, over our immense inland seas, our mighty Mississippi, our far-reaching Missouri, our beautiful Ohio, our Red river, famous for the rich lands that it washes, bespeak, in language of *thunder* and of *light*, what the spirit of emigration has done for this new land of promise. The great flood of people, flowing like a tide from the east, to make their homes on the confines of our distant territory, to extend the power and to defend the republic if necessary, are justly entitled to good roads, and to have their rivers freed from obstructions. In the eyes of the purest philanthropy, it is a pleasing subject of contemplation to feel and know that a mighty band of settlers can form a magic cordon, that peacefully, though most potentially, makes the spirit of blood and Indian massacre quail within its peace-preserving circle.

Nor is it astonishing that the march of enterprise should be towards the west—a region of country little else than a continuous garden of fertility. Of Wiskonsan there seems to have been but one opinion, from the time it was first seen by white men. A late English writer, a stranger in that region, in his journey through the west, having recently passed over most of the very country surveyed by our engineers, with the view to the improvement of Wiskonsan, thus speaks of it: "I consider the Wiskonsan Territory as the finest portion of North America, not only from its soil, but its climate. The air is pure, and the winters, although severe, are dry and bracing; very different from, and more healthy than, those of the eastern States. At Prairie du Chien every one dwelt upon the beauty of the winter. Indeed, they appeared to prefer it to the other seasons. The country is, as I have described it in my route from Green Bay, alternate prairie, oak openings, and forest. Limestone quarries abound. Indeed, the whole of this beautiful region appears as if nature had so arranged it, that man should have all difficulties cleared from before him, and have little to do but to take possession and enjoy. There is no clearing of timber required. On the contrary, you have as much as you can desire of cleared land. Prairies of fine rich grass, upon which cattle fatten in three or four months, lie spread in every direction. The soil is so fertile, that you have but to turn it up, to make it yield grain to any extent; and the climate is healthy, at the same time that there is more than sufficient sun in the summer and autumn to bring every crop to perfection. Land carriage is hardly required, from the numerous rivers and streams which pour their waters from every direction into the lakes and Upper Mississippi. Added to this, the western lands possess an inexhaustible supply of minerals, only a few feet under the surface of their rich soil; which is singular and wonderful, as, in general, where minerals are found below, the soil above is usually arid and ungrateful. The prairies here are not very large, seldom

being above six or seven miles in length or breadth ; generally speaking, they lie in gentle undulating flats, and the ridges and hills between them are composed of oak openings. To form an idea of these oak openings, imagine an inland country covered with splendid trees, about as thickly planted as in our English park-scenery ; in fact, it is English park-scenery—nature having here spontaneously produced what it has been the care and labor of centuries in our own country to effect. Sometimes the prairie will run and extend along the hills, and assume an undulating appearance, like the long swell of the ocean ; it is then called rolling prairie.

“ Often have I looked down upon some fifteen or twenty thousand acres of these prairies, full of rich grass, without an animal, tame or wild, to be seen. I would fancy what thousands of cattle will in a few years be luxuriating in those pastures, which, since the herds of buffalo have *retreated from them*, are now useless, throwing up each year a fresh crop, to seed and die unheeded.”

Considering that this stranger visited Wiskonsan without bias or prejudice in its favor, his testimony will be received by all as most conclusive and satisfactory. When his work shall have been spread before all Europe, and have been duly examined, this section of the nation will soon be flooded with new inhabitants.

In Wiskonsan there seems to be every thing to induce the United States to make the required improvements. Opposite to Fort Howard, on the river Neenah, at the head of Green bay, stands the beautiful town of Astor. It is one of the most interesting places in the west—elegant society, a healthful location, and a point at which not unfrequently one thousand passengers arrive in a single week. If the improvements asked for by the Secretary of War were completed, much of the travelling to the south would be through the lakes, up the Neenah, and down the Wiskonsan river to the Mississippi. This region is surrounded with an atmosphere that has no taint of sickness in its balmy breeze. From the days of Father Hennepin, who visited these lakes and rivers in 1679, down to this time, the heights of Wiskonsan have been fanned by the purest air.

Along the Neenah the manufacturer will find two of the very best water powers—one at De Pere, the present head of steamboat navigation ; and the other at the Kawkalaw rapids. They are scarcely equalled in any of the States.

Every individual residing in the south should anxiously desire an open passage to the lakes from the Mississippi. The Neenah and Wiskonsan occasionally, in the swelling of their streams, intermingle their waters, being only one and a quarter mile apart ; the Neenah running with a smooth and gentle current to the lakes, and the Wiskonsan sweeping its way to the Mississippi. In the judgment of all correct observers, the day is in sight when factories will be busily employed in these salubrious regions upon the southern staple, cotton ; and when the navigation shall have been completed, as proposed, it may be reached by the southern planter in seven or eight days at farthest. As soon as this great line is opened, (and the expenditure is so small that no one can object to it,) all will be able to see the full merits of this proposed improvement.

The Wiskonsan river is margined with a most magnificent scenery, and its name signifies “ the river with flowery banks.” When these two streams shall have been united in bonds of abiding amity, and can be traversed by the same vessels throughout their united extent, one can then leave Buffalo

and reach New Orleans by this route, propelled the whole distance by steam. It can only be necessary to present this view to the nation, to satisfy the east, the west, the north, and the south, that this union should be consummated without delay.

It may not be out of place here to add, that a portion of the navigation of Neenah river is through Lake Winnebago, one of the most splendid sheets of water in the whole west. It is about 27 miles long and 10 miles broad. Its circumference is 74 miles, and covers 211.64 square miles surface. "It would be difficult," says the engineer who surveyed it, "to convey an adequate idea of the matchless beauty and sublimity of the natural scenery of Lake Winnebago. It must be seen, before its full effect can be duly appreciated."

Besides, in the voyage from the Mississippi, by the way of Wiskonsan and Neenah, to Buffalo, the traveller will pass Mackinaw island, where the white-fish and the salmon-trout can be obtained in the greatest abundance; and so soon as the junction shall be effected between the Mississippi and the lakes, these fish will be sent in profusion to the southern market. To such persons as do not wish to go as far east as Winnebago lake, or who desire the pleasures of hunting, fishing, and bathing nearer home, and at the same time to explore the mineral region of Wiskonsan, they can visit, by the way of Rock river, the enchanting Four Lake country; or leave the Mississippi at Senapee, and pass through the mines in stage coaches, to Madison, the seat of government of the Territory, which is seated upon an eminence which overlooks the third and fourth lakes—a spot unrivalled by any seat of government in the world. Not far from this charming location, you find the lands underlaid with the richest mineral, a large portion of which will be sent north by the new line of navigation. And what seems to be the wonder of all who have visited that district, is, that this mineral land is not broken and sterile, as in other mineral countries, but is covered by a deep and most fertile soil. It may be farmed for years; and then the owner, if he thinks prudent, may dig up his hidden treasures. The farmer will always find, if he lives near the mines, a ready sale for his produce; for strangers are coming continually to the mineral grounds from Cornwall, in England, the home and country of the best miners in the world, a large portion of whom take up their abode at or near Mineral Point, one of the most important towns in the whole Territory. If the farmer does not live in the vicinity of the mines, or should wish another market, he can reach Milwaukee, that beautiful lake city, with her inviting bay—a town which is destined, when she shall have her harbor made, to rival the best cities of the east. Those residing farther south can wend their way to Racine and Southport, two growing sister towns of the thriving lake family. Those who desire to push their way up or down the Mississippi, can leave the western side of the Territory at Prairie du Chien, Cassville, Lafayette, or Senapee—towns in the morning of their existence, but destined soon "to lengthen their borders and strengthen their stakes."

All this, too, without reference to the disputed territory which Illinois declines to give up to Wiskonsan, on account of its invaluable lands, splendid towns, and excellent and intelligent population. But Wiskonsan will succeed in this claim, as well on account of its justice, as the determined resolves of those residing within her boundaries to have their rights. Illinois will have to give up this section of country, for a mere legislative claim can never be sustained against a constitutional grant. The union among those who wish to have the line of Wiskonsau fixed agreeably to the ordinance of 1787, is so



strong that it cannot be successfully resisted. These men can wield a moral and political power that must produce acquiescence; and the sooner the fictitious claim of Illinois is settled, the better for all parties. To form a true estimate of the Territory of Wiskonsan, however, as recognised by the ordinance, one must read the able report of Professor Owen, who recently, under the orders of the Government, has made a full communication upon its great value. When this report shall have been generally read, it will excite the amazement of men of letters and intelligence everywhere, to find such an overflow of all that is beautiful and essential to man's happiness concentrated in a single section of this great country.

It may be added, that the Territory of Wiskonsan has as many lakes within her borders as the Empire State, and bids fair, from her fine forests, her copper, her lead, her iron, her zinc, her incomparable fish, her fertile soil, and, above all, her proverbially salubrious climate, to at least equal any other portion of the republic. The greater part of these valuable lands of the Territory are yet in the hands of the Government for sale. Indeed, the striking characteristics of this region are so captivating, that some of the most enlightened citizens of the Old World are looking to it as their home and the home of their children. Is it proposing, therefore, too much to the United States, the great landholder of the Territory, to make an appropriation to connect the great-lakes with the great Mississippi?—a connexion, too, that forms a most direct and facile communication with Fort Snelling, Fort Winnebago, Fort Crawford, and Fort Howard. In the event of war, this union of the forts would be highly advantageous; and in peace, one could traverse a region of country, either for business or pleasure, from the Gulf of Mexico to the Gulf of the St. Lawrence, in which health confessedly holds a delightful and perennial sway.

I have the honor to be, sir, with great respect, your obedient servant,

J. D. DOTY.

Hon. CHARLES OGLE,

*Chairman of the Committee on Roads and Canals.*